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NUTRIENT REQUIREMENTS

FOR

HIGH STRESS ENVIRONMENTS

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NUTRIENT REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGH STRESS ENVIRONMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The military battlefield has long been recognized as an arena of intense physical and mental stress (Figure 1). It is hard to imagine a more stressful environment than the battlefield of the immediate future. Combat will be intensive, rapid, violent, and fought day and night. Altered work-rest cycles, dramatic sleep loss associated with sustained operations and rapid deployment to unfamiliar environments very different from that to which the soldier is acclimated will impose high levels of stress. This will be exacerbated by the lack of adequate nutrition rising from interdicted supply lines, contaminated food or simply a lack of an opportunity to eat. These physical and emotional hardships of combat all contribute to the condition we loosely term "stress" (Figure 2). Stress is a rather ill-defined term. All of us have experienced it, yet few of us would agree upon its exact definition. Stress to one person might be merely stimulation to another. A generally accepted definition of stress is that provided by Dorland's Medical Dictionary (1):

Stress is "The sum of all non-specific biological phenomena elicited by adverse external influences."

The enumeration of the contributors to stress and the general

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subject of stress itself are beyond the scope of this paper. For the purpose of this discussion, I would like to confine my remarks to the environmental stress that the soldier encounters in military operations (Figure 3) and discuss the special nutrient requirements arising from environmental stress. Finally, I would like to discuss the feasibility of providing specific nutrients to prevent stress related performance decrements.

NUTRIENT REQUIREMENTS

The familiar concept of the biological dose-response curve that has served us so well in other areas of medicine is also very applicable to illustrating essential nutrient requirements (2,3). Figure 4 depicts a dose-response curve for a hypothetical essential nutrient that is related to a physiological function. I would like to emphasize that such dose-response curves are representative of a population; an individual's dose-response curve may be broader or steeper, and possess a lower or higher optimal level than the mean function for a population. In general, however, it is possible to establish a range of nutrient intakes that will support a "normal" or, arguably, an "optimal" physiological function for the majority of individuals in a population. Controversy arises when the influence of "stress" is superimposed upon the dose-response curve. It is known that certain types of stress can result in an increased requirement for specific nutrients (4). The entire dose-response curve may be shifted toward the right requiring

a higher nutrient intake to support a specific physiologic function (Figure 5). This is predictable when the stress causes an increased degradation and excretion of the nutrient itself (i.e. trauma and nitrogen) or an increased synthesis of products based upon that nutrient (i.e. lactation and calcium). Controversy arises when one generalizes that all types of stress automatically shift the dose-response curve to the right. The health food industry is quick to capitalize on such generalizations, ignoring the fact that, in many instances, a) the optimal nutrient intake range for many physiological functions is rather broad and b) the stress may not be severe enough to cause a perturbation in the body's equilibrium for a nutrient (5).

ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS AND ENERGY AND WATER REQUIREMENTS

I would like to illustrate how the dietary intake of two macronutrients, energy and water, can influence physical performance under the stress of an extreme or "hostile" environment. The relationship of energy and water requirements to environmental stress is illustrated in Figure 6. Heat, cold, and altitude can create increased requirements for water and energy while simultaneously decreasing the availability of these critical nutrients (6). Dehydration and caloric deficiency can severely limit physical performance (7). Fasting for as little as 24-27 hours can markedly reduce cycling or running endurance (8,9). Water deficits of as little as 2-3% of body weight can

lead to performance decrements (10). Carried to an extreme, hypohydration can lead to reduced blood volume, decreased heat dissipation, reduced kidney function and ultimately death (11,12). Hyperhydration, on the other hand does not seem to provide any particular thermal advantage during exercise-heat stress but can delay the development of hypohydration (12).

The stress of work in hot or cold environments can increase energy requirements (6). The range of energy requirements for comparable workloads in temperate, cold and hot environments is shown in table 1.

(INSERT TABLE 1 HERE)

Consolazio (13) reviewed energy requirements of soldiers working in hot environments and concluded that there was approximately a 10% increase in metabolic rate for work at 100°F compared to work at 70°F. The increased energy requirement is thought to be due to the increased cardiovascular work needed to dissipate heat, increased sweat gland activity and elevated metabolic rate. Energy requirements for activities in the cold may also be increased by approximately 5-10% (6,14). This increase is more related to the biomechanical inefficiencies of walking on snow and ice and the hobbling effect of heavy clothing and boots than any direct effect on metabolism, provided adequate clothing is worn (15). If an individual exposed to the cold is inadequately clothed, shivering may cause a 5-fold elevation in resting energy expenditure (16).

There is little evidence that chronic high altitude exposure increases the requirement for any specific nutrients other than water and possibly iron (17). Altitude exposure causes an increased erythropoietic response as the oxygen delivery system of the blood attempts to compensate for reduced hemoglobin oxygen saturation (18). Normal dietary iron intakes are adequate to support the increased hemoglobin synthesis for males at high altitude; however the erythropoietic response in females benefits from iron supplementation (17). Water requirements at altitude can be greater than those at sea level due to the low humidity of the atmosphere at altitude and the hyperventilation associated with altitude exposure (17).

OTHER NUTRIENTS THAT MAY BE EFFECTIVE IN COMBATING ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS

Two other nutrients (carbohydrate and tyrosine) may be helpful in combating the stress of high altitude exposure. Consolazio et al (19) has demonstrated that high carbohydrate diets reduce the severity of the symptoms (headache, nausea, lethargy, mood) of acute high altitude exposure. Askew et al (20) suggested that carbohydrate supplementation may be beneficial in preventing physical performance decrements during the initial 48 hours of altitude exposure. Providing an additional 200 g of carbohydrate per day to soldiers working at altitude not only increased aerobic work capacity, but also prevented a negative nitrogen balance during the stressful

first 24 hours of altitude exposure (20).

Banderet et al (21) have studied the combined effects of cold and altitude on performance, mood and symptoms normally associated with acute exposure to high altitude and cold. They found that tyrosine (100 mg/kg) decreased symptom intensities, adverse moods, and performance impairments caused by cold and high altitude exposure. Tyrosine is a neutral amino acid that is a precursor of three neurotransmitters; norepinephrine, dopamine and epinephrine. Some stressful situations cause depletion of these catecholaminergic neurotransmitters (22). Tyrosine may reverse stress-induced neurochemical deficits by providing additional precursor for the synthesis of these neurotransmitters (23). Neurotransmitters are critical messengers in the sequence of communication between neurons. Altering the synthesis, storage, neuronal levels, or release of neurotransmitters alters brain function and may be expected to affect behavior (24,25). Other neurotransmitters such as serotonin (tryptophan precursor) and acetylcholine (choline precursor) possess potential for dietary influence on the synthesis of brain neurotransmitters (26). These dietary precursors of neurotransmitters are shown in Table 2.

(INSERT TABLE 2 HERE)

SUMMARY

The challenge of providing nutrients for a high stress environment is providing a balanced palatable diet containing

high levels of carbohydrate and energy. The best diet in the world will not be effective without adequate fluid replacement. Environmental stress increases energy and fluid requirements but, in general, does not result in increased vitamin and mineral requirements. However, certain nutrients such as carbohydrate and tyrosine may be useful in preventing some undesirable mood symptoms or performance decrements arising from stressful environments.

The opinions or assertions contained herein are the private views of the author and are not to be construed as official or as reflecting the views of the Department of Defense.

Table 1--Energy Requirements for Physical Activity in Temperate, Cold and Hot Environments¹

Physical Activity	Environment		
	Temperate	Cold (kcal/kg/body weight)	Hot
Light	32-44	35-46	40-54
Moderate	45-52	47-55	55-61
Heavy	53-63	56-68	62-75

¹From Consolazio (13)

Table 2--Dietary Precursors of Neurotransmitters¹

Precursor	Neurotransmitter(s)	Role of Neurotransmitter
Tyrosine	norepinephrine epinephrine dopamine	behavioral response to stress, mood, emotion, certain components of motor performance
Tryptophan	serotonin	regulation of sleep, pain sensitivity and mood state
Choline	acetylcholine	related to memory, social behavior, maintenance of mood

¹From Growdon et al (24), Lieberman et al (25) and Wurtman (26)

FIGURE LEGENDS

- Figure 1 Stress associated with the military battlefield.
- Figure 2 Some contributors to physical and emotional stress.
- Figure 3 Some contributors to environmental stress.
- Figure 4 Schematic dose-response curve for nutrient requirements.
- Figure 5 Schematic stress-induced shift of dose-response curve for nutrient requirements.
- Figure 6 Effect of a "hostile" environment on work performance.

THE BATTLEFIELD

HEAT

COLD

MOUNTAINS

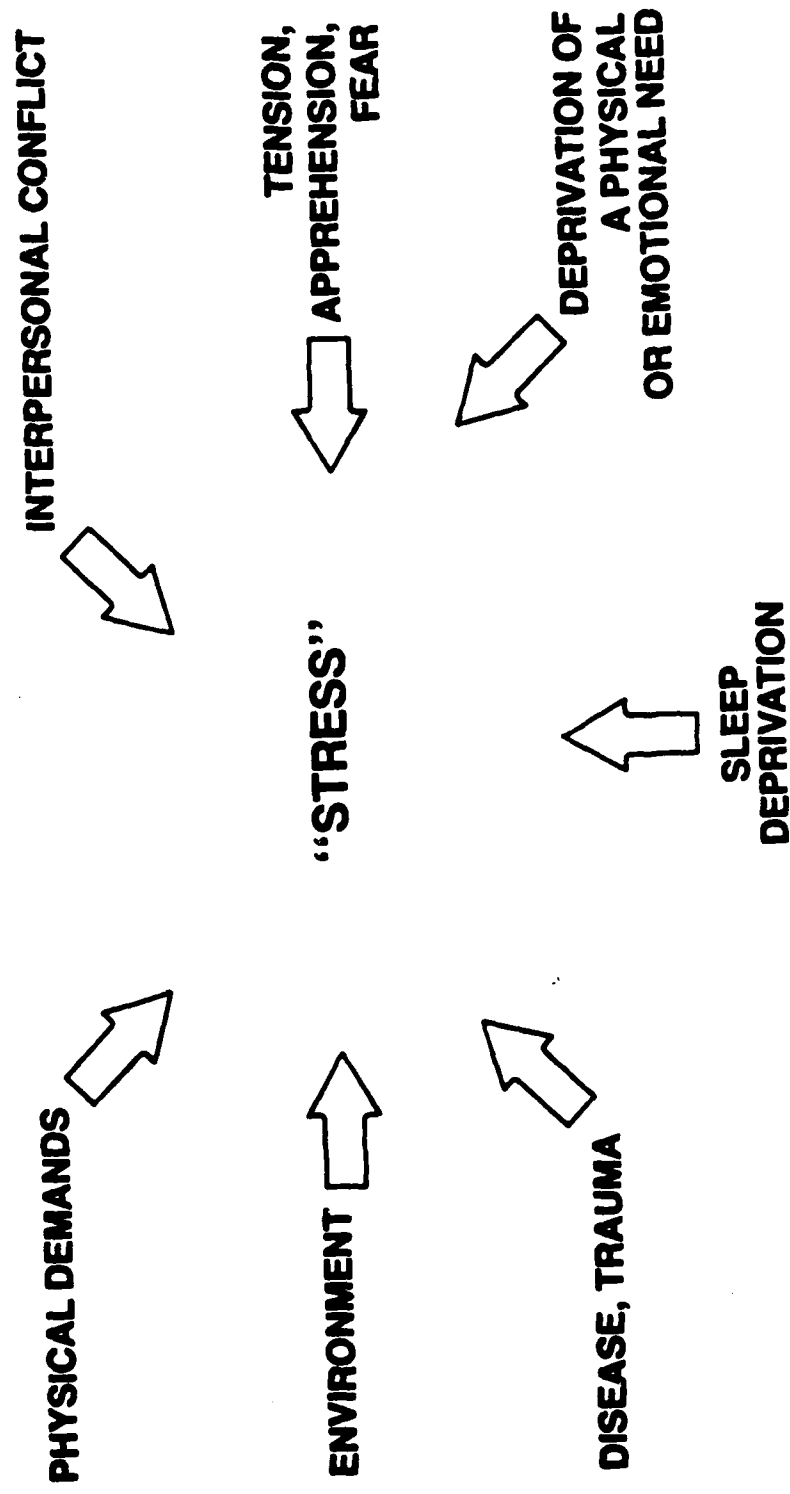
LACK OF FOOD. REST

DISEASE

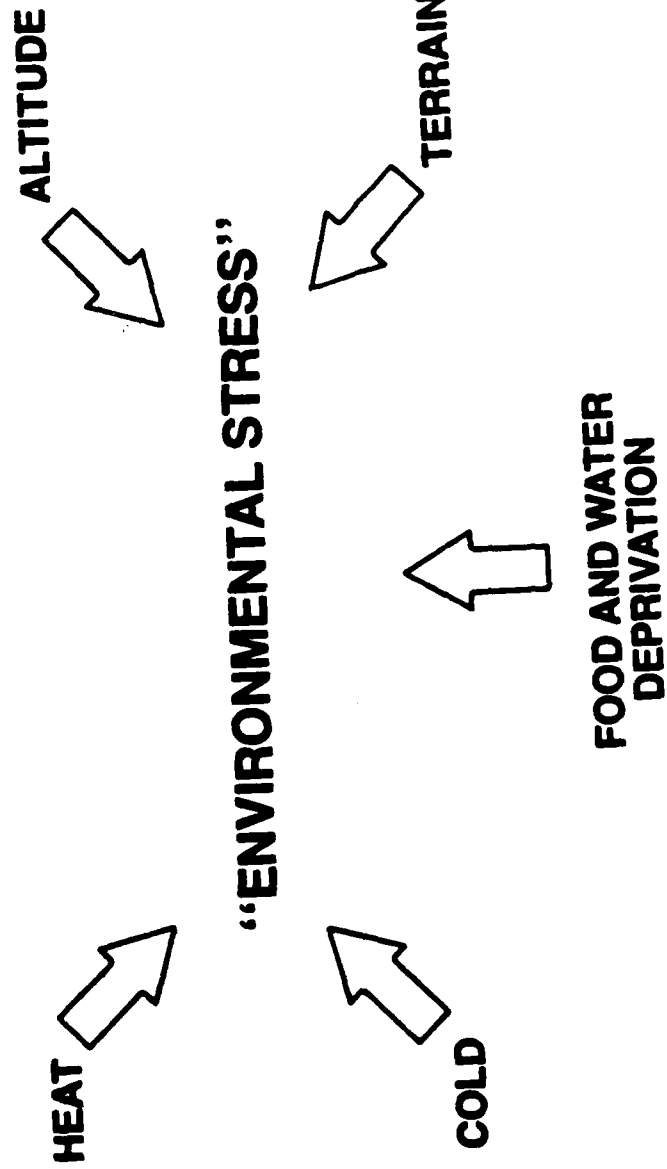
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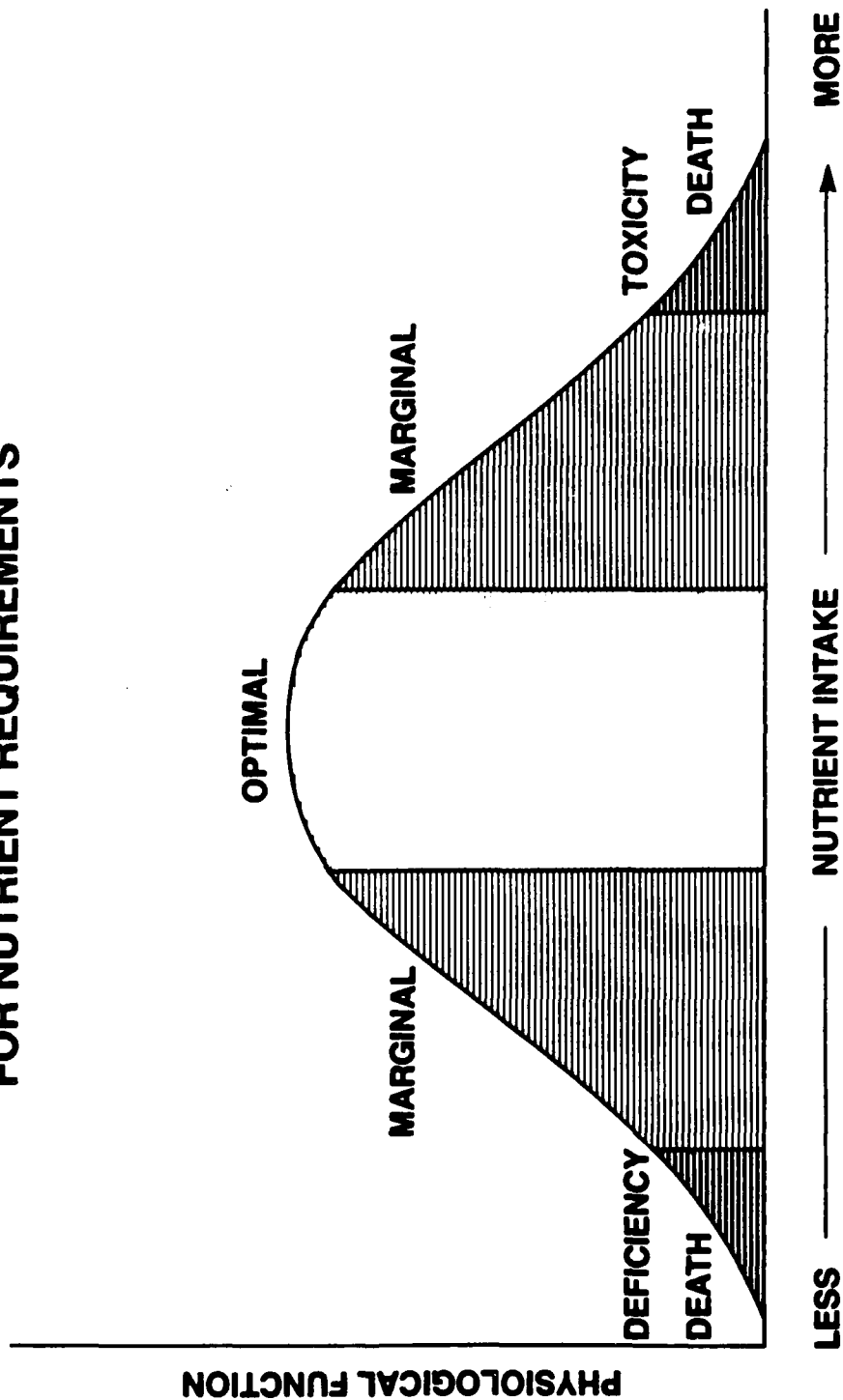
SOME CONTRIBUTORS TO PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL STRESS



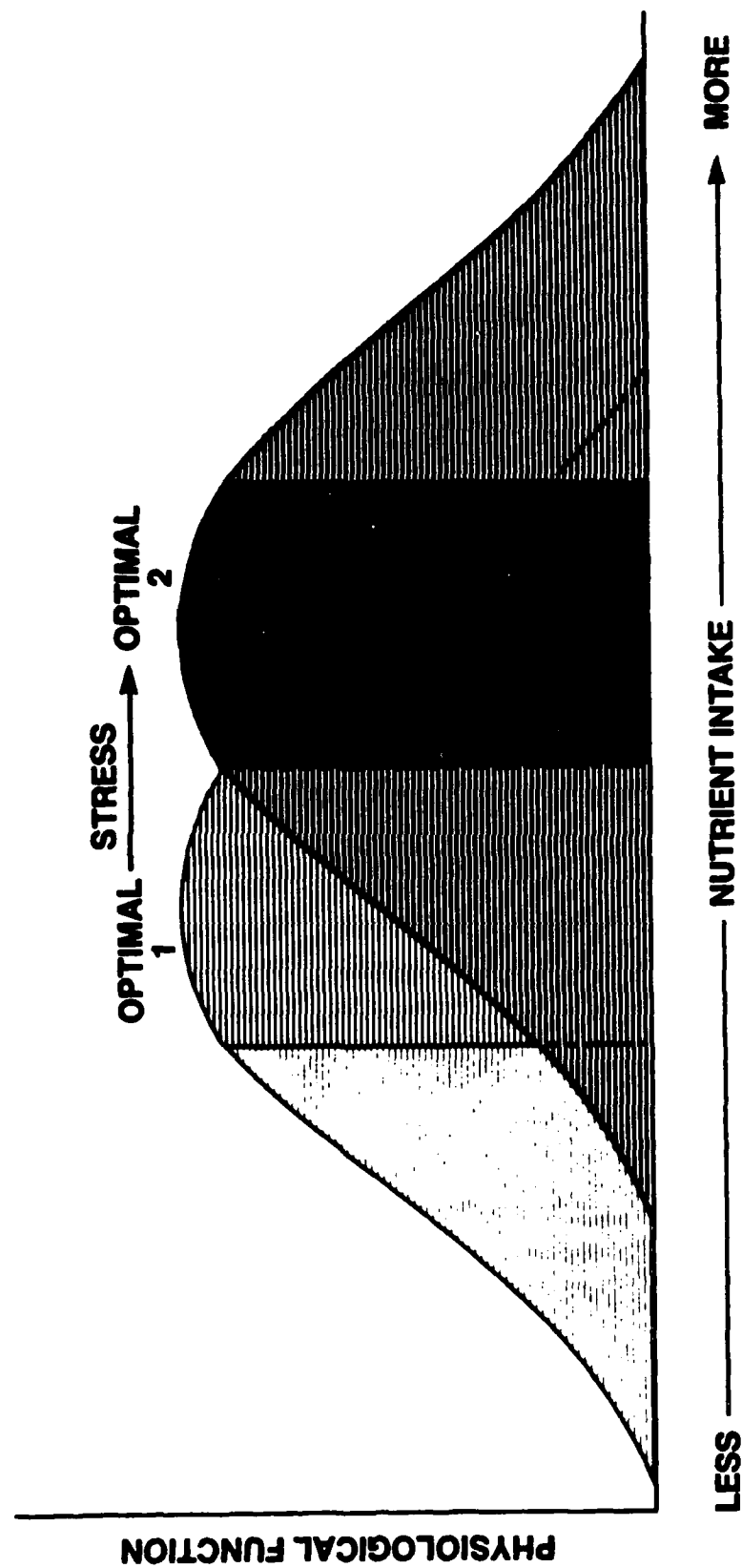
CONTRIBUTORS TO ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS



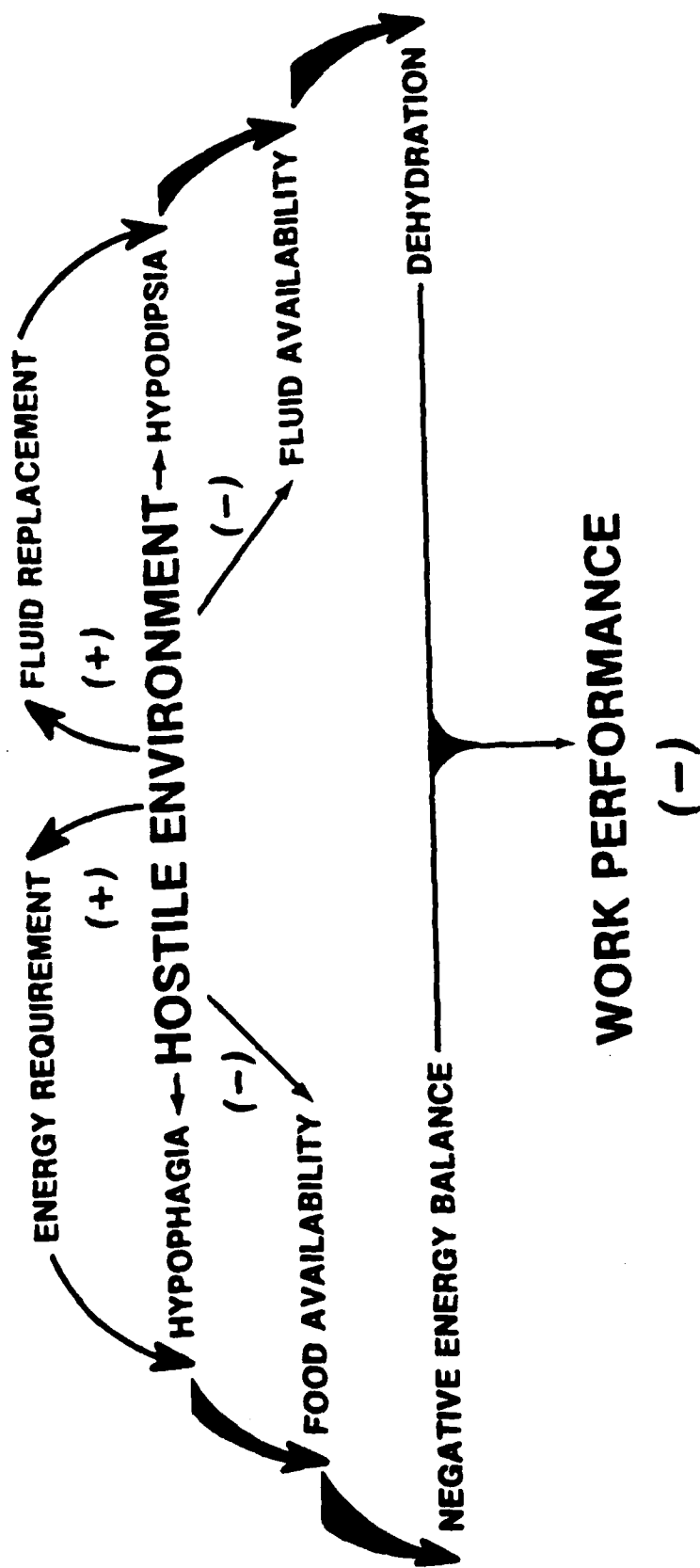
SCHEMATIC DOSE-RESPONSE CURVE FOR NUTRIENT REQUIREMENTS



**SCHEMATIC STRESS-INDUCED SHIFT
OF DOSE-RESPONSE CURVE
FOR NUTRIENT REQUIREMENTS**



EFFECT OF A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT ON WORK PERFORMANCE



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